Alberta

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the fourth Session of the Twenty-second Legislature of the Province of Alberta.

On behalf of my government, I wish to encourage all Albertans to become involved in the celebration of Canada's 125th birthday. I am sure many of us remember the joy of our Centennial, and the feelings of kinship of the 1988 Winter Olympics. I urge Albertans to rekindle those feelings as we embark upon the next phase in our journey in nationhood together.

My government, the people of Alberta, and all Canadians face enormous challenges in adapting to the new and ever-changing realities our nation and our world offer to us. Governments cannot stop or control change, but, together with the people, we can have a major influence on our future.

These new realities will find us confronting issues more complex than we have ever faced, but difficult problems also provide us with the opportunity for renewal so we can make our world a better place.

As we address the new fiscal, economic, environmental, social and constitutional realities together, my government and Albertans know that the role of government -- and the role of citizens -- will continue to change. Cooperation, listening and consultation is required more than ever. The instruments of democracy in Alberta and Canada are changing. My government and Albertans must ensure that our institutions and actions truly reflect our desires and values.

My government stands for Albertans, Alberta and Canada. My government will provide leadership, instill confidence, and be loyal to the people it serves. I now outline the directions my government will take.

The Economic and Fiscal Reality

Stimulating the Alberta economy and jobs for Albertans must be our first priority. My government has been listening to Albertans, and must be candid and realistic about the economic conditions facing Albertans and Canadians. While our province is strong relative to the rest of Canada, Albertans have been hurt by the harsh Canadian recession. Alberta's economy is also being affected by reduced federal government support, increased federal taxation, growing demands on services, an inflated currency, and sharp drops in commodity prices. Confidence is low and people are worried about their future.

Many Albertans face economic hardship, and my government must provide help at a time when provincial budget revenues have been seriously eroded. Tough choices must be made between fiscal restraint, stimulating our economy to provide jobs, and caring for the less fortunate. We have built a quality of life in Alberta that is among the best, but also among the most costly in the world, and my government recognizes we must maintain that quality -- in education, health care, social services, environmental protection, and other such responsibilities.

By listening to the people, my government knows Albertans recognize that the resources of my government are limited, and that they must have realistic expectations with respect to what a government can provide in a fiscally responsible manner.

My government is determined to face difficult, long standing pension problems. Solutions are difficult but necessary. Legislation will be introduced to amend the Local Authorities, Public Service, Public Service Management, Universities Academic and Special Forces pension plans. The legislation will follow the release of proposals last July and extensive public consultations over the past year. Agreements with the Public Service and

Local Authorities Pension Boards have already been reached. The legislation will establish full funding for future pension costs, retire existing unfunded liability of the plans, improve portability of benefits, and allow employers and employees a greater role in decisions regarding the plans. Members of this Assembly will be asked to increase contributions to their pension plan by 33 per cent, in order to ensure continued fairness and equity.

Alberta needs a strong economy to support our social programs and maintain our high quality of life. At the same time, my government realizes that it is our high quality of life that makes Alberta an attractive place to live and do business.

While new initiatives are needed to help Albertans now, we must also build a vision for our future, and chart a course towards continued prosperity. Working with business, labour, and community leaders throughout the province, my government has embarked upon a program -- entitled *Toward 2000 Together* -- to ensure our future economic strength. The cornerstone of the program is listening to the people in order to create a partnership across all sectors to address our province's economic priorities. *Towards 2000 Together* will allow Albertans to decide their own economic future.

My government also recognizes that cooperation between provinces and the federal government is important to our economic future. By dismantling inter-provincial trade barriers and strengthening economic cooperation, my government will encourage the development of a more efficient economic union in Canada to create new business and employment opportunities for Albertans.

My government will listen to, and work with Alberta's processors and manufacturers, our farmers, our small businesses and entrepreneurs, and our investors and exporters, in order to improve competitiveness. Through new

market development initiatives for our agricultural and manufacturing sectors ... new manufacturing assistance ... looking for more opportunities to privatize government activities ... and introducing entrepreneurial education programs, my government will continue to assist business in becoming more productive and diversified.

Recognizing how vital energy is to the health of our provincial economy, my government will continue to listen to and work with our industry in expanding natural gas sales outside Alberta, and in conducting a review of our natural resource royalties.

My government also recognizes the importance that advanced technology and research play in developing new industries, and in helping existing industries be more efficient and competitive. Through the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Research Council, the Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation, Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, Farming for the Future, and other agencies and initiatives, my government will continue to support the development of world-class science and technology.

Much of Alberta's economic prosperity depends upon international trade. My government will work to ensure that Albertans are able to take full advantage of our many trading arrangements, including the Free Trade Agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, and a North American Free Trade Agreement when it is successfully negotiated. My government will also pursue new trading relationships in Asia, the Middle East, South America and Eastern Europe in order to assist business in pursuing new markets for our province's goods and services.

Finally, my government will continue to enhance our international relationships through our foreign offices, trade missions, and our special relationships in Asia and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, Albertans tell my government, and my government believes that business -- and individuals -- should not be subject to over-regulation, and that the private sector -- not government -- will determine our ultimate economic success. My government also hears and believes that Albertans are ready to address the new economic realities, and that our business sector will continue to prosper. The Alberta countryside will be clean, vibrant and productive. Alberta enterprise will continue to be strong and free.

The Environmental Reality

The environmental realities facing the world require continued commitment from my government and Albertans. In order to find solutions that will balance a strong, sustainable economy and a healthy environment, my government has conducted an extensive listening and consultation process over the past two years to develop new legislation. This legislation, written by Albertans, should be concluded in this Session, and will be amongst the most comprehensive and progressive in the world.

My government remains committed to assisting individual Albertans to be protectors of our environment. Alberta's waste management, recycling and education programs have helped our citizens become more aware of their role in protecting and enhancing the environment, and my government will continue to implement and strengthen these programs.

Alberta is on the leading edge in developing new environmental technologies and products. My government will continue to encourage the development, use and export of technologies and products to benefit Albertans and people around the world.

My government recognizes that air, soil and water do not respect provincial or national boundaries. My government will review the recommendations contained in the report of Clean Air Strategy for Alberta Advisory Group and take action on implementation in this Session. My government will continue -- in cooperation with other governments the private sector, and individual Albertans -- to adopt a global approach in addressing the new environmental realities.

The Social Reality

By listening to Albertans, my government knows our society is ever-changing. The choices facing parents, children, students, the disabled and seniors become more complex every day. Addressing the social realities in Alberta requires cooperation from my government and Albertans. My government remains steadfast in its commitment to both maintaining those elements in our society we cherish, while helping to influence social renewal.

A key to Albertans' quality of life is our health. My government believes the future of the health system must, to the greatest possible extent, be built on the principles of accessibility and universality -- principles that Albertans cherish. At the same time, my government must ensure that these principles are implemented more effectively, and that increased taxation and expenditure is not the simple solution to health care delivery.

My government has consulted with Albertans to define a contemporary role for all sectors in health. By developing a Health Research Strategy ... by implementing a technology assessment process ... and by improving the Health Information System, my government will continue to streamline our health care system for the benefit of all Albertans, now and in the future.

Educating Albertans remains of primary importance to my government. With a comprehensive agenda for change, as reflected in the *Vision for the Nineties* document, my government will improve our education system through a greater emphasis on the achievement of results, so as to ensure that Alberta students are prepared for the challenges of the next century.

By developing new career, and science and technology programs ... improving the level of service to students with special needs ... developing new strategies for higher education ... and renewing our commitment to the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Fund, my government will respond to the changing educational realities in this province.

To respond to the social realities in Alberta, my government must continue to find innovative ways to balance increasing demands and limited resources.

My government recognizes the contributions seniors have made and continue to make to our province. Through a provincial conference on seniors and other initiatives, my government will renew our commitment to provide for seniors a safe and productive lifestyle, while encouraging them to become fully participant in addressing today's challenges.

The safety of Albertans remains a priority for my government. By implementing new traffic safety initiatives ... workplace safety programs ... and continuing an Occupational Health and Safety Heritage Grant Program, my government will encourage Albertans to live safer, healthier lives.

My government is determined to respond to changing needs. New Access to Information legislation will be introduced to ensure my government's policy of full disclosure of information is protected in law.

My government's new plain language policies will make government services and procedures more accessible and more understandable to Albertans.

The strength of Alberta society rests on its family based foundation and in the diversity of our backgrounds. In addressing the new social realities, my government will continue to assist new immigrants to Alberta in adapting to -- and contributing to -- life in our beautiful province.

My government will also continue to strengthen the family in Alberta by protecting children in and out of the home ... implementing new initiatives to prevent family violence ... enhancing the cultural and recreational opportunities ... and responding to the special concerns of Alberta's aboriginal peoples.

Together, my government and the people of Alberta will face the new social realities, and in so doing, provide a better quality of life and greater opportunity to present and future generations.

The Constitutional Reality

Albertans and Canadians are facing the most fundamental review of our constitution since our country was founded. During the Third Session of this Legislature, the Legislature proposed the establishment of a Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform to listen to Albertans and develop a proposal for Alberta in a new Canada.

The Committee has completed its work, and has issued its report to this Assembly and Albertans for consideration. The public consultation process the Committee embarked upon was the most extensive in our province's history. My government will not introduce a constitutional amendment to this Assembly without again consulting Albertans. My government will

propose legislation in this Session that will provide a mechanism to fulfil this commitment.

Throughout the upcoming months -- crucial months for the future of our nation -- my government will continue to promote the ideals Albertans have expressed to us -- unity, equality and respect -- in addressing the constitutional realities in Canada.

In the course of the Committee's hearings, many recommendations were made with respect to improving the functioning of this Legislature, and making it more responsive to the needs and values of Albertans. My government will propose that a Select Special Committee of the Legislature be established to review how these measures and other reforms might be adopted within the context of our parliamentary system and traditions.

My government remains committed -- through this Assembly -- to assisting Albertans to prosper amidst the new realities and actions I have outlined today.

In addition, during this Session, my government will:

- Conclude the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act;
- Implement new economic development initiatives to provide opportunities across many economic sectors;
- Implement recommendations from the Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System;
- Implement a new Natural Resources Management Policy;
- Amend the Elections Act;
- Introduce a new Municipal Government Act that will serve as a model for the twenty-first century;
- Implement recommendations from the Family and Community Support Services Program;

- Implement plain language policies;
- Proclaim the Landlord and Tenant Act;
- Amend the School Act;
- Introduce legislation to promote greater energy efficiency;
- Amend the Highway Traffic and Motor Transport acts to enhance traffic safety; and
- Introduce other legislation programs and fiscal measures for consideration and deliberation in this Assembly.

My government is continually seeking to strengthen its working relationship with Albertans. It is essential in order to deal with the realities outlined today.

These are not easy times for people or governments. The complex nature of problems brought on by rapid change challenge and test us daily. Many events are beyond our ability to control, and only by a dedication to listening to each other and working together can we build a partnership that can successfully influence our future. We must be creative together as we move towards the twenty-first century.

Recognizing these challenging times and difficult choices is a major stride towards addressing them. My government believes that if Albertans are made fully aware of the nature of the challenges before them, they have the capacity and strength to deal with them in effective and creative ways as they continue to reach for the magnificent potential Alberta and Canada promise.

In due course you will be presented with budget estimates. You will be asked to authorize the necessary funds for operating services and expenditures, and to endorse a program of capital financing for the Government of Alberta. You represent a beautiful province of strength, hope and promise.

And now I leave you to the business of this Session, confident that as elected representatives you will in every way fulfil your responsibilities to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

I pray that the blessing of God may rest upon your deliberations.

God Bless Alberta
God Bless Canada
God Save the Queen